

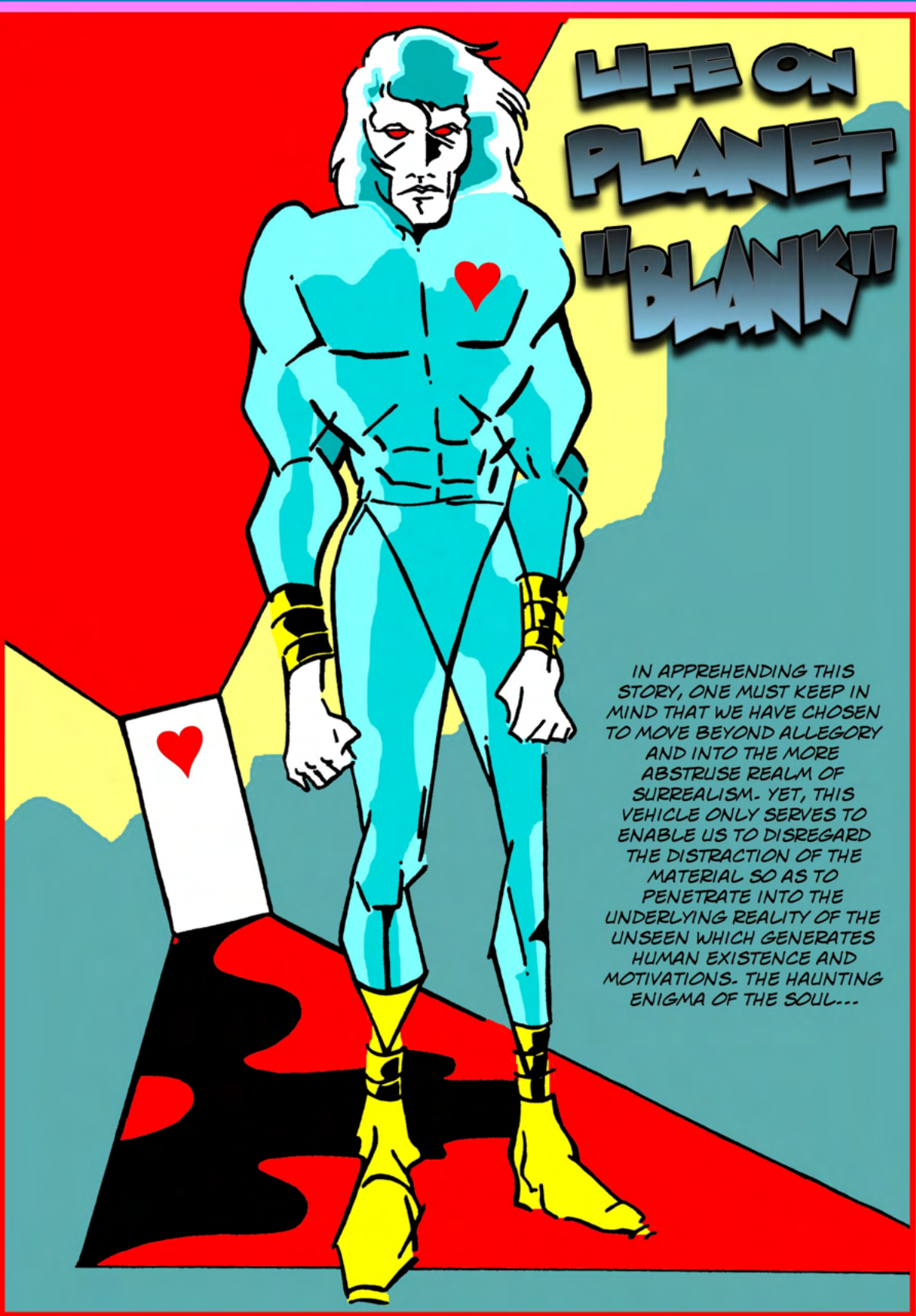
I EXIST...

...BUT WHY?



LIFE ON PLANET "BLANK!"

TM



LIFE ON PLANET "BLANK"

IN APPREHENDING THIS STORY, ONE MUST KEEP IN MIND THAT WE HAVE CHOSEN TO MOVE BEYOND ALLEGORY AND INTO THE MORE ABSTRUSE REALM OF SURREALISM. YET, THIS VEHICLE ONLY SERVES TO ENABLE US TO DISREGARD THE DISTRACTION OF THE MATERIAL SO AS TO PENETRATE INTO THE UNDERLYING REALITY OF THE UNSEEN WHICH GENERATES HUMAN EXISTENCE AND MOTIVATIONS. THE HAUNTING ENIGMA OF THE SOUL....

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PROLOGUE:

DARKNESS SURROUNDS THE OUTER FILM OF THE OBJECT IN THE AMNIONIC SAC. FLUIDS MOVE IN AND OUT OF THE EMBRYONIC TUBE CONNECTING THE BEING TO HIS MOTHER. WARMTH AND SILENCE. THIS A WORLD OF COMFORT...ADRIFT IN THE SEA OF TRANQUILITY.

THE SENTIENT MOVES INEVITABLY ALONG THE RIVER OF SORROW TOWARDS THE PORTAL IN THE DISTANCE. THIS PLACE OF UNRESPONSIVE GLOOM BUT FORESHADOWS THAT WHICH IS TO COME. DOES HE THINK...DOES HE KNOW...IS HE...AWARE?

GESTATION: JOURNEY TO THE NIGHTMARE PLANET

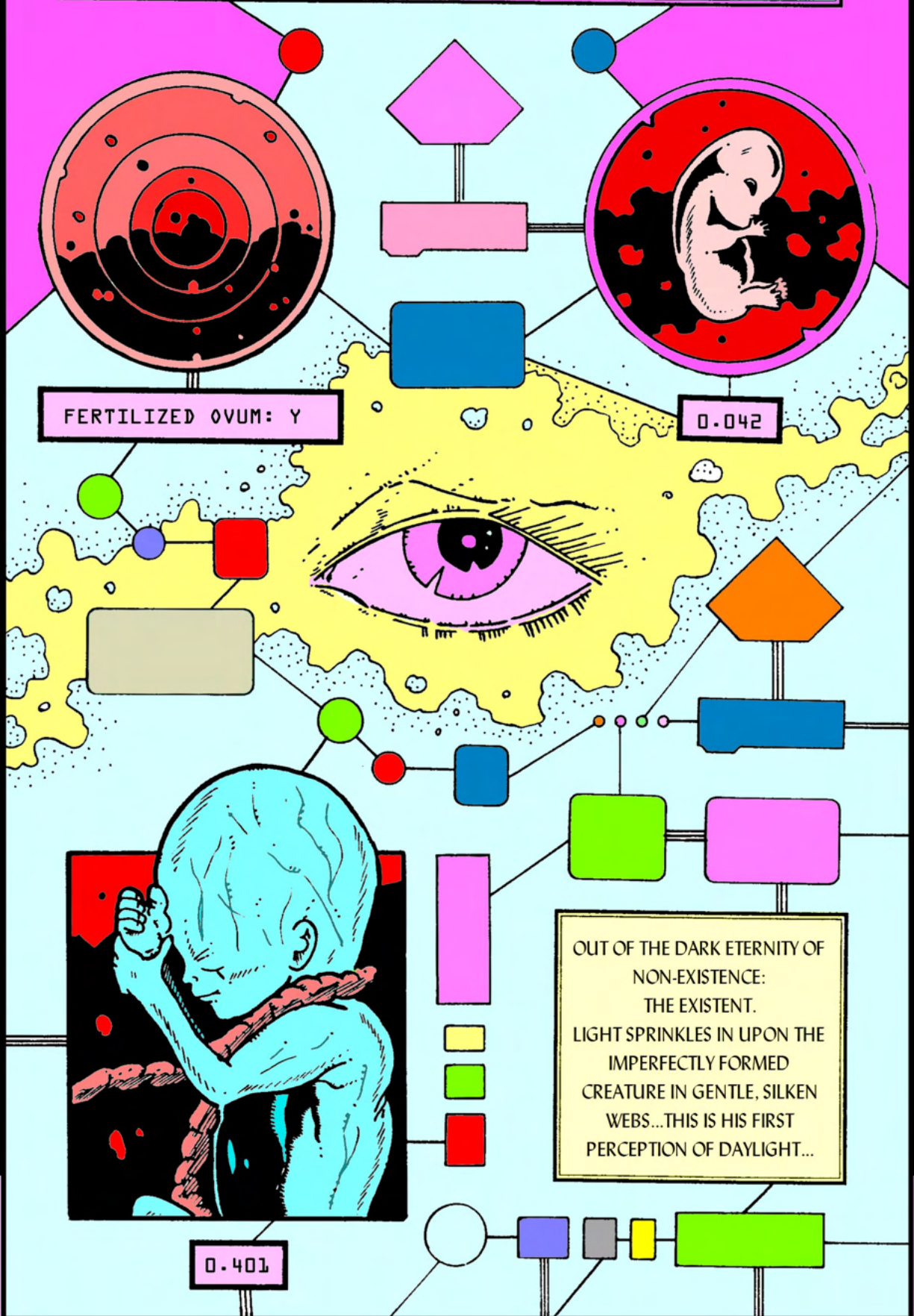


LIFE ON PLANET "BLANK"

FROM CONCEPTION TO BIRTH TO DEATH AND BEYOND THERE IS:

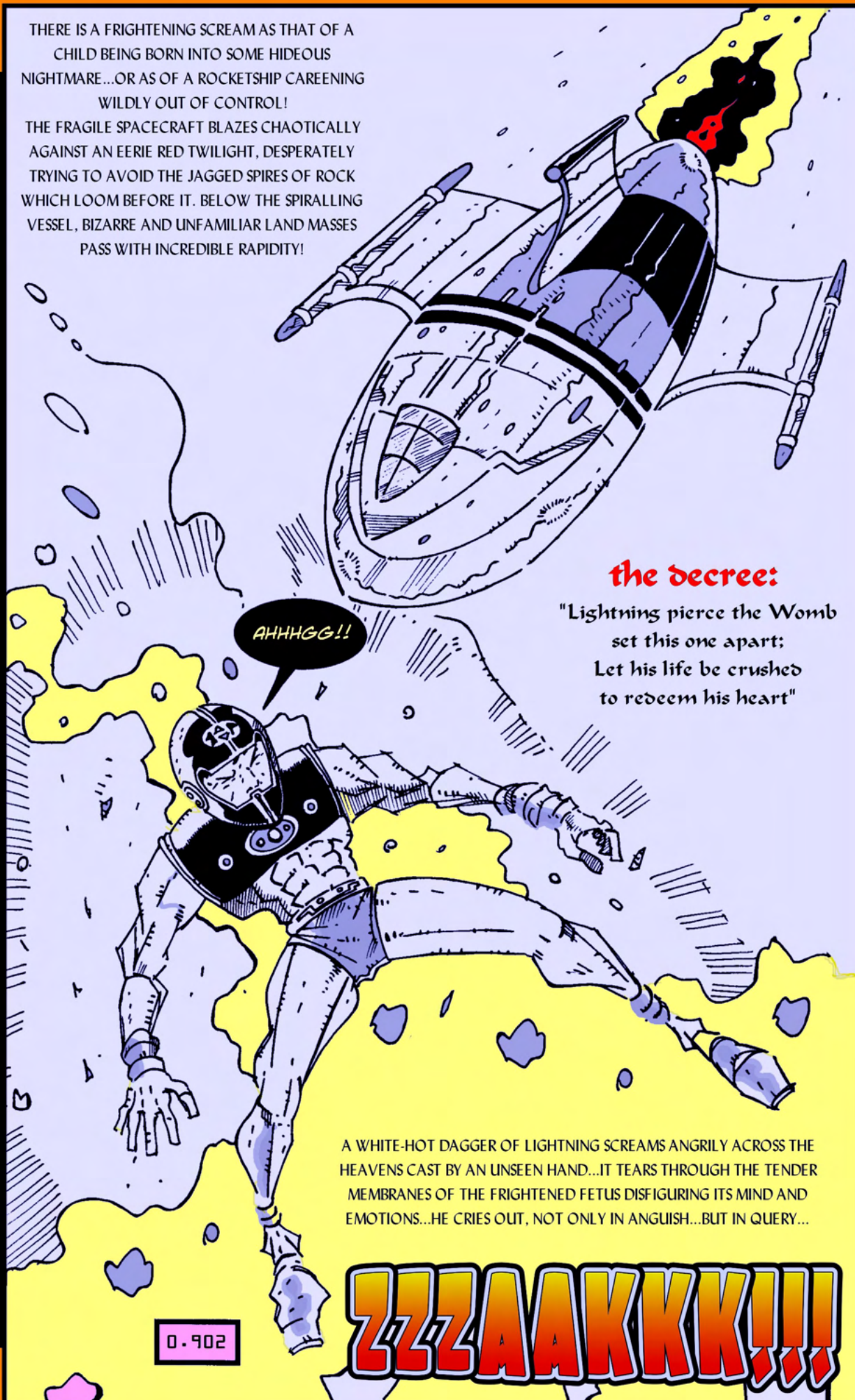
THE EYE

VIEWING, CONTEMPLATING, RECORDING ALL THAT IS.



THERE IS A FRIGHTENING SCREAM AS THAT OF A CHILD BEING BORN INTO SOME HIDEOUS NIGHTMARE...OR AS OF A ROCKETSHIP CAREENING WILDLY OUT OF CONTROL!

THE FRAGILE SPACECRAFT BLAZES CHAOTICALLY AGAINST AN EERIE RED TWILIGHT, DESPERATELY TRYING TO AVOID THE JAGGED SPIRES OF ROCK WHICH LOOM BEFORE IT. BELOW THE SPIRALLING VESSEL, BIZARRE AND UNFAMILIAR LAND MASSES PASS WITH INCREDIBLE RAPIDITY!



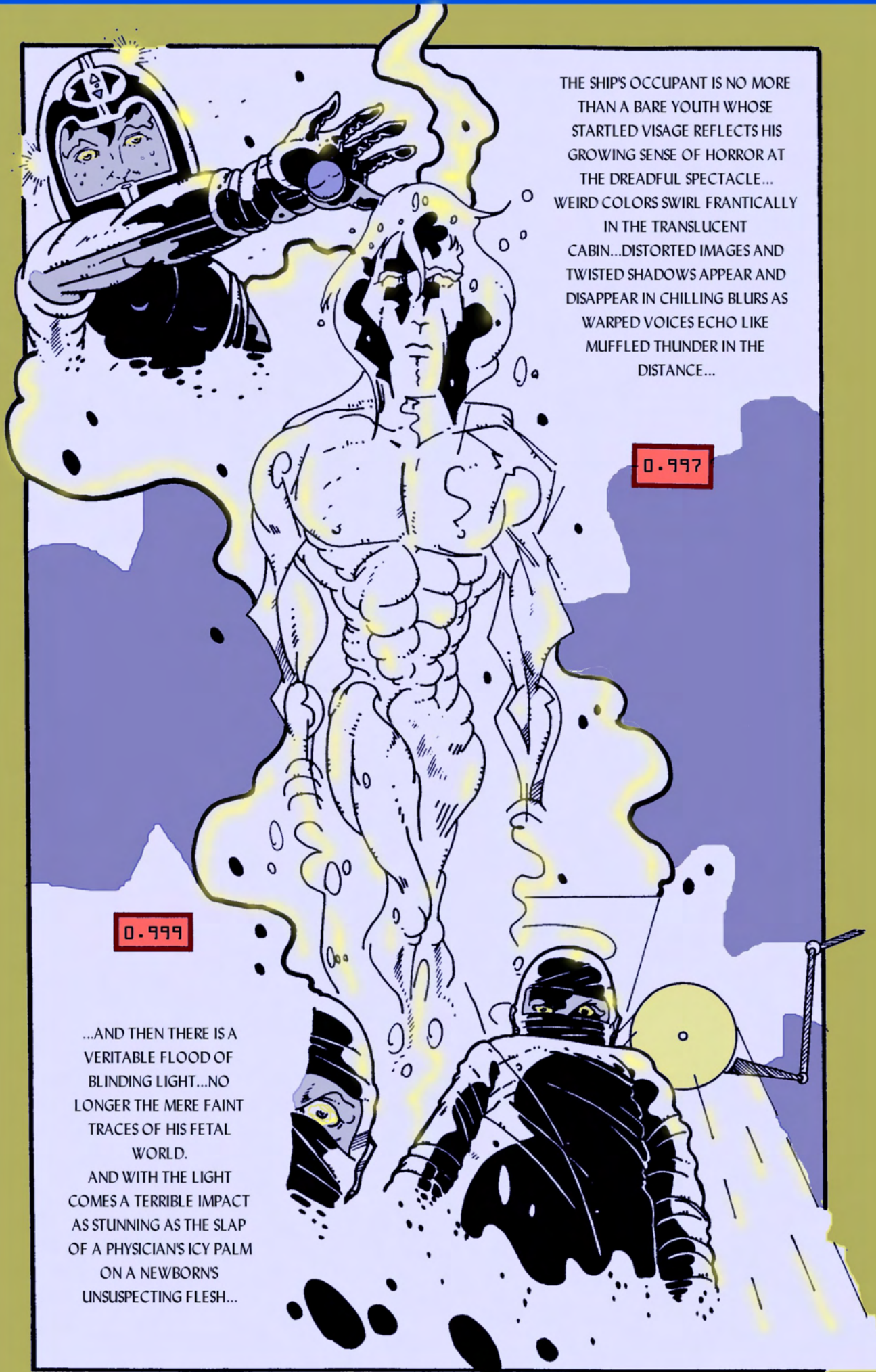
the decree:

"Lightning pierce the Womb
set this one apart;
Let his life be crushed
to redeem his heart"

A WHITE-HOT DAGGER OF LIGHTNING SCREAMS ANGRILY ACROSS THE HEAVENS CAST BY AN UNSEEN HAND...IT TEARS THROUGH THE TENDER MEMBRANES OF THE FRIGHTENED FETUS DISFIGURING ITS MIND AND EMOTIONS...HE CRIES OUT, NOT ONLY IN ANGLISH...BUT IN QUERY...

0.902

ZZZAAAKKK!!!



THE SHIP'S OCCUPANT IS NO MORE THAN A BARE YOUTH WHOSE STARTLED VISAGE REFLECTS HIS GROWING SENSE OF HORROR AT THE DREADFUL SPECTACLE... WEIRD COLORS SWIRL FRANTICALLY IN THE TRANSLUCENT CABIN...DISTORTED IMAGES AND TWISTED SHADOWS APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR IN CHILLING BLURS AS WARPED VOICES ECHO LIKE MUFFLED THUNDER IN THE DISTANCE...

0.997

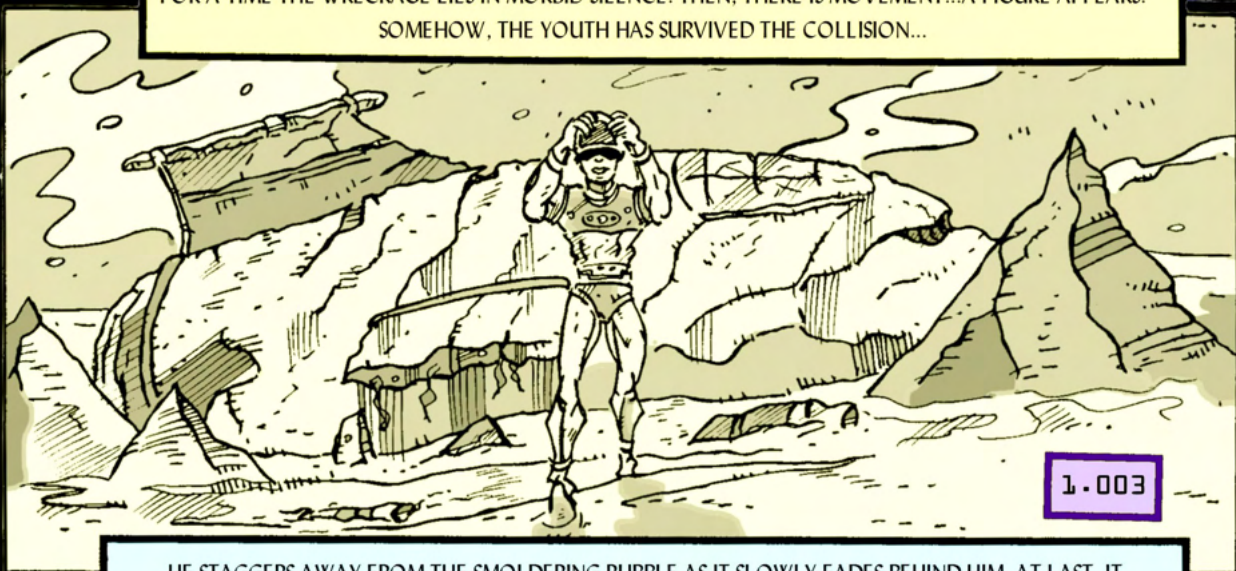
0.999

...AND THEN THERE IS A VERITABLE FLOOD OF BLINDING LIGHT...NO LONGER THE MERE FAINT TRACES OF HIS FETAL WORLD. AND WITH THE LIGHT COMES A TERRIBLE IMPACT AS STUNNING AS THE SLAP OF A PHYSICIAN'S ICY PALM ON A NEWBORN'S UNSUSPECTING FLESH...

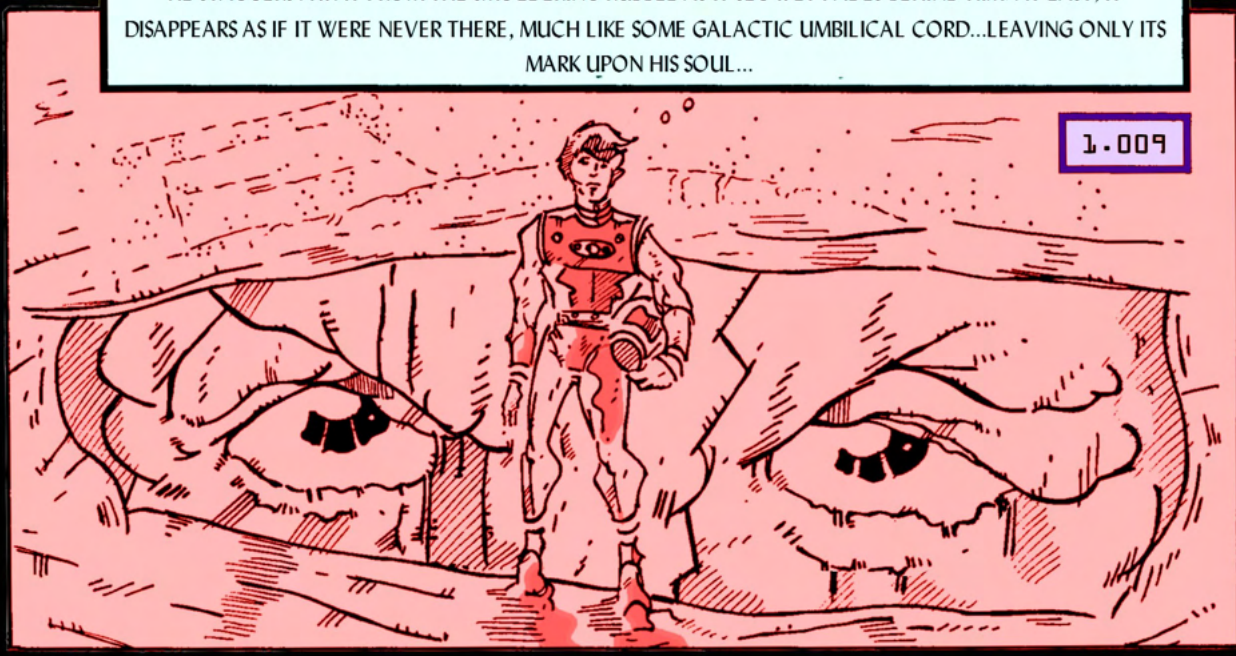
A R R I V A L



FOR A TIME THE WRECKAGE LIES IN MORBID SILENCE. THEN, THERE IS MOVEMENT...A FIGURE APPEARS. SOMEHOW, THE YOUTH HAS SURVIVED THE COLLISION...



HE STAGGERS AWAY FROM THE SMOLDERING RUBBLE AS IT SLOWLY FADES BEHIND HIM. AT LAST, IT DISAPPEARS AS IF IT WERE NEVER THERE, MUCH LIKE SOME GALACTIC UMBILICAL CORD...LEAVING ONLY ITS MARK UPON HIS SOUL...



WELCOME...

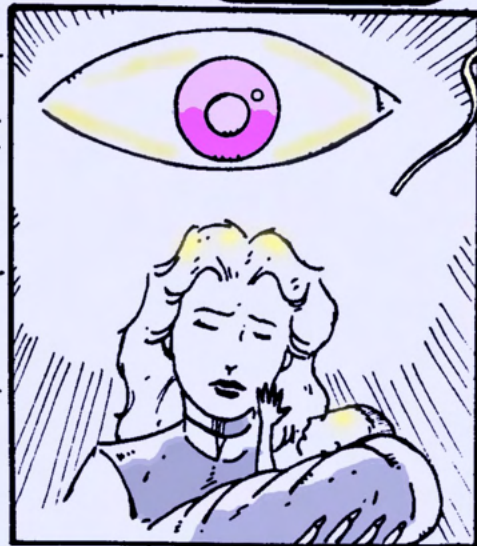


POINT
OF
INJURY

I'M AFRAID YOUR SON
SUFFERED **SERIOUS**
INJURY DURING
CHILD-BIRTH...

...IT'S TOO EARLY
FOR ME TO SAY WHAT
EFFECT IT WILL HAVE
ON HIM...

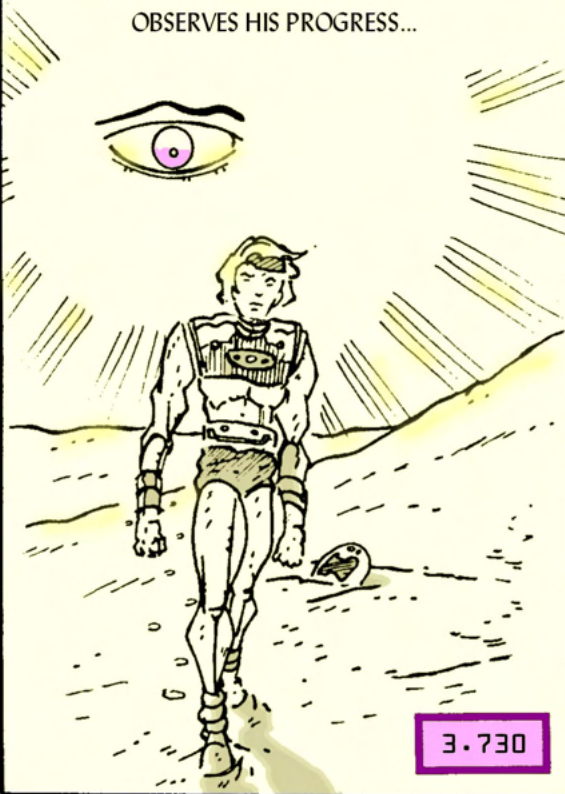
HIS LIFE IS
RUINED!!
MY GOD,
WHAT HAVE
I DONE??
WHAT HAVE
I **DONE??**



2.016

TOO LATE THE WOMAN
REALIZES THE AWFUL
RESPONSIBILITY OF
BRINGING A LIVING,
FEELING BEING INTO A
WORLD SUCH AS THIS...

THE YOUNG MAN MAKES HIS WAY ACROSS
A STRANGE AND BARREN WILDERNESS...IN
THE DISTANCE, A LONE EYE HOVERS AND
OBSERVES HIS PROGRESS...



3.730

THE YOUTH SUDDENLY BECOMES
AWARE OF THE PRESENCE OF THE EYE.
HE SHOULD BE FRIGHTENED BY SUCH
AN UNUSUAL PHENOMENON, BUT
ODDLY ENOUGH- HE IS NOT.

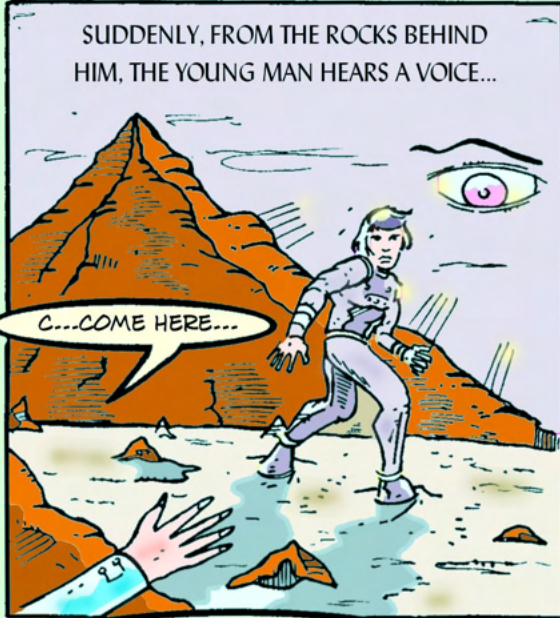


WHO...OR WHAT
ARE YOU??

5.201

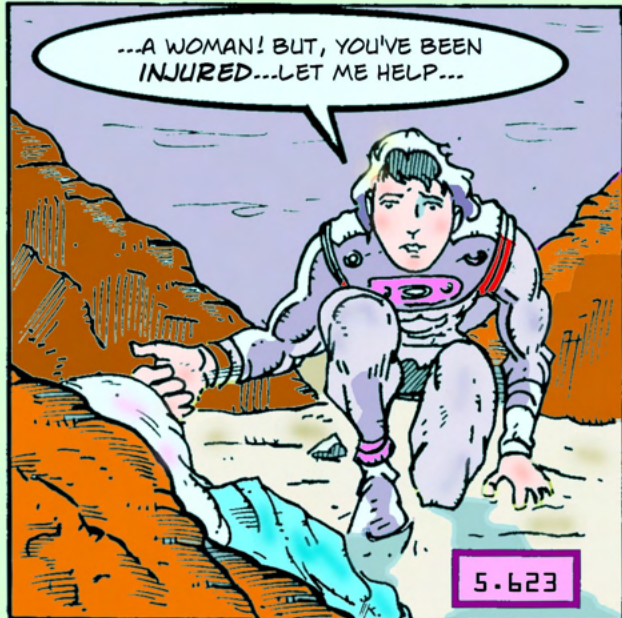


THO' QUESTIONED THE EYE
REMAINS SILENT; ITS NATURE
AND INTENTS ULTIMATELY
INCOMPREHENSIBLE.



SUDDENLY, FROM THE ROCKS BEHIND HIM, THE YOUNG MAN HEARS A VOICE...

C...COME HERE...



...A WOMAN! BUT, YOU'VE BEEN INJURED...LET ME HELP...

5.623



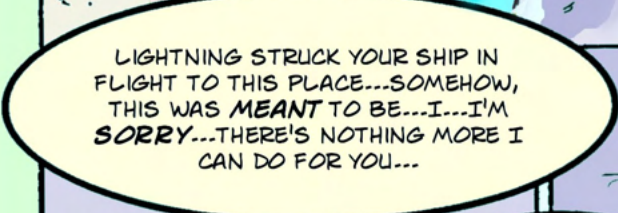
NO...NO, IT WON'T BE NECESSARY...I'LL RECOVER...IT'S YOU I'M CONCERNED FOR...

...ME? BUT, WHY?



...FOLLOW THE EYE AND SEEK THE **SANCTUM**...IT'S THE ONLY **REFUGE** YOU'LL HAVE IN THIS WORLD...

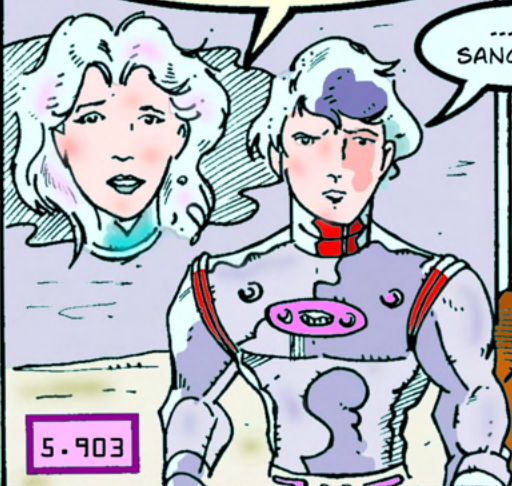
I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND.



LIGHTNING STRUCK YOUR SHIP IN FLIGHT TO THIS PLACE...SOMEHOW, THIS WAS MEANT TO BE...I...I'M SORRY...THERE'S NOTHING MORE I CAN DO FOR YOU...



YOU'LL FIND IT AT THE **FARTHEST** EDGE OF THE FIELD OF "MIND"... GO NOW...



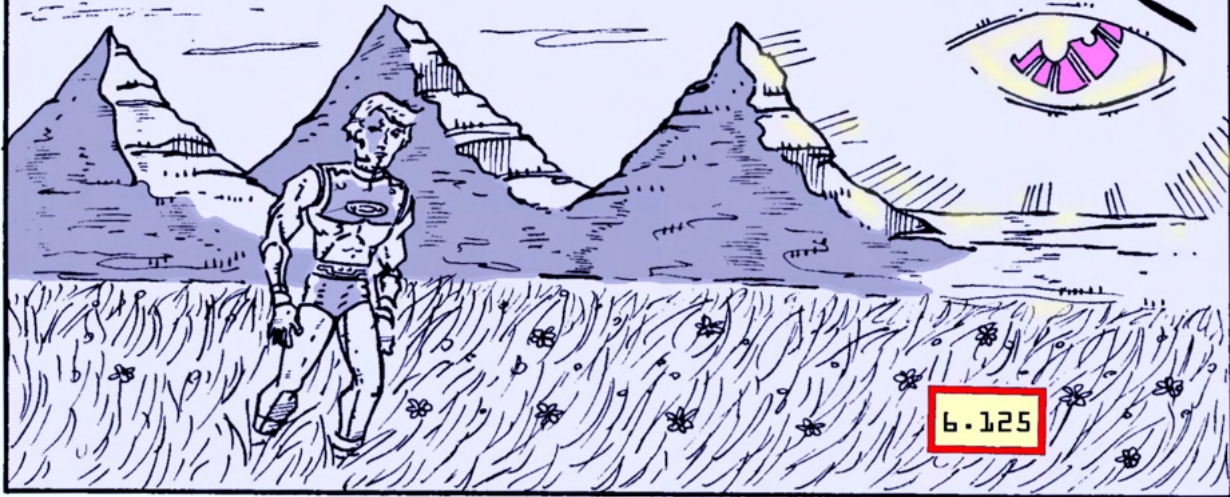
...THE **SANCTUM**?



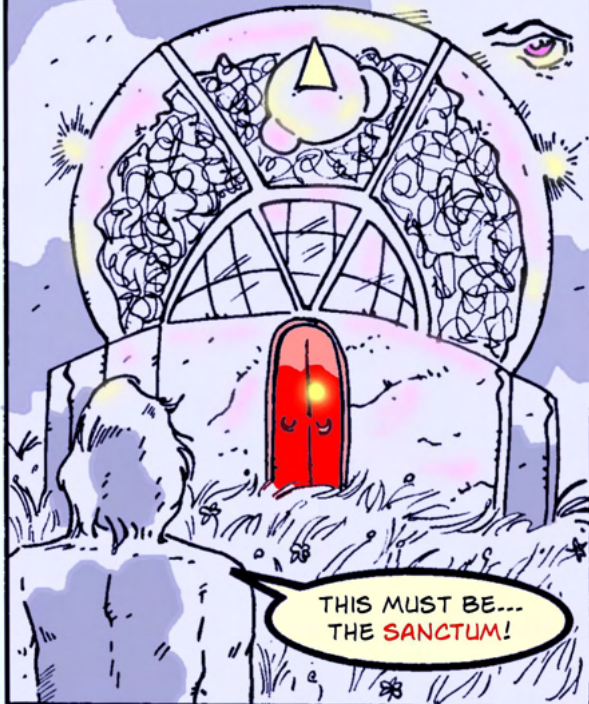
...AND **GOODBYE**, MY SON!

5.903

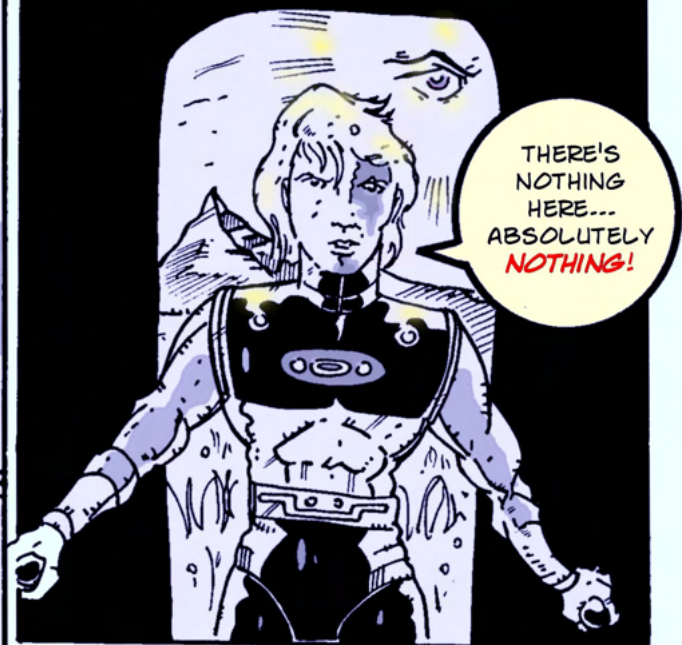
THE EYE LEADS THE YOUTH ACROSS A LONG AND BEAUTIFUL FIELD OF FLOWERS...



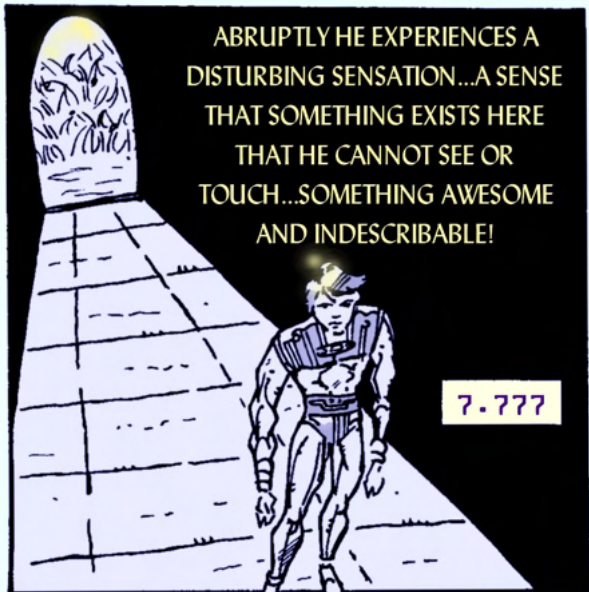
AT THE VERY END OF THE FIELD HE COMES UPON A STRANGE, DOME-LIKE BUILDING...



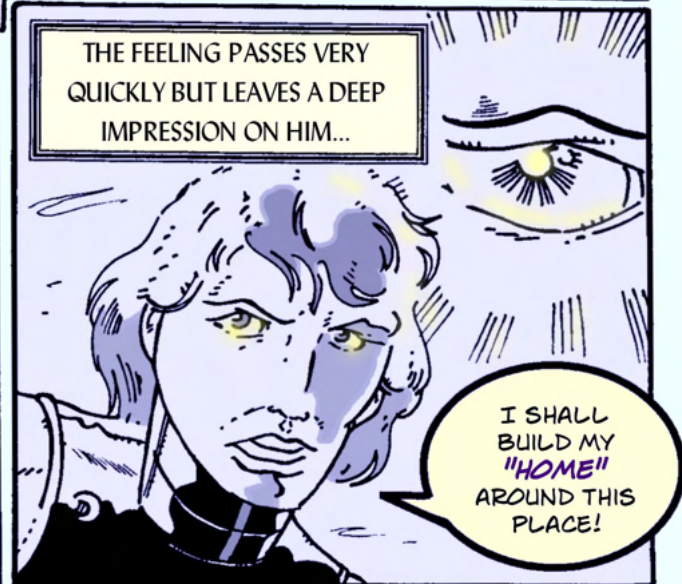
UPON ENTERING THE STRUCTURE HE FINDS...



ABRUPTLY HE EXPERIENCES A DISTURBING SENSATION... A SENSE THAT SOMETHING EXISTS HERE THAT HE CANNOT SEE OR TOUCH... SOMETHING AWESOME AND INDESCRIBABLE!



THE FEELING PASSES VERY QUICKLY BUT LEAVES A DEEP IMPRESSION ON HIM...



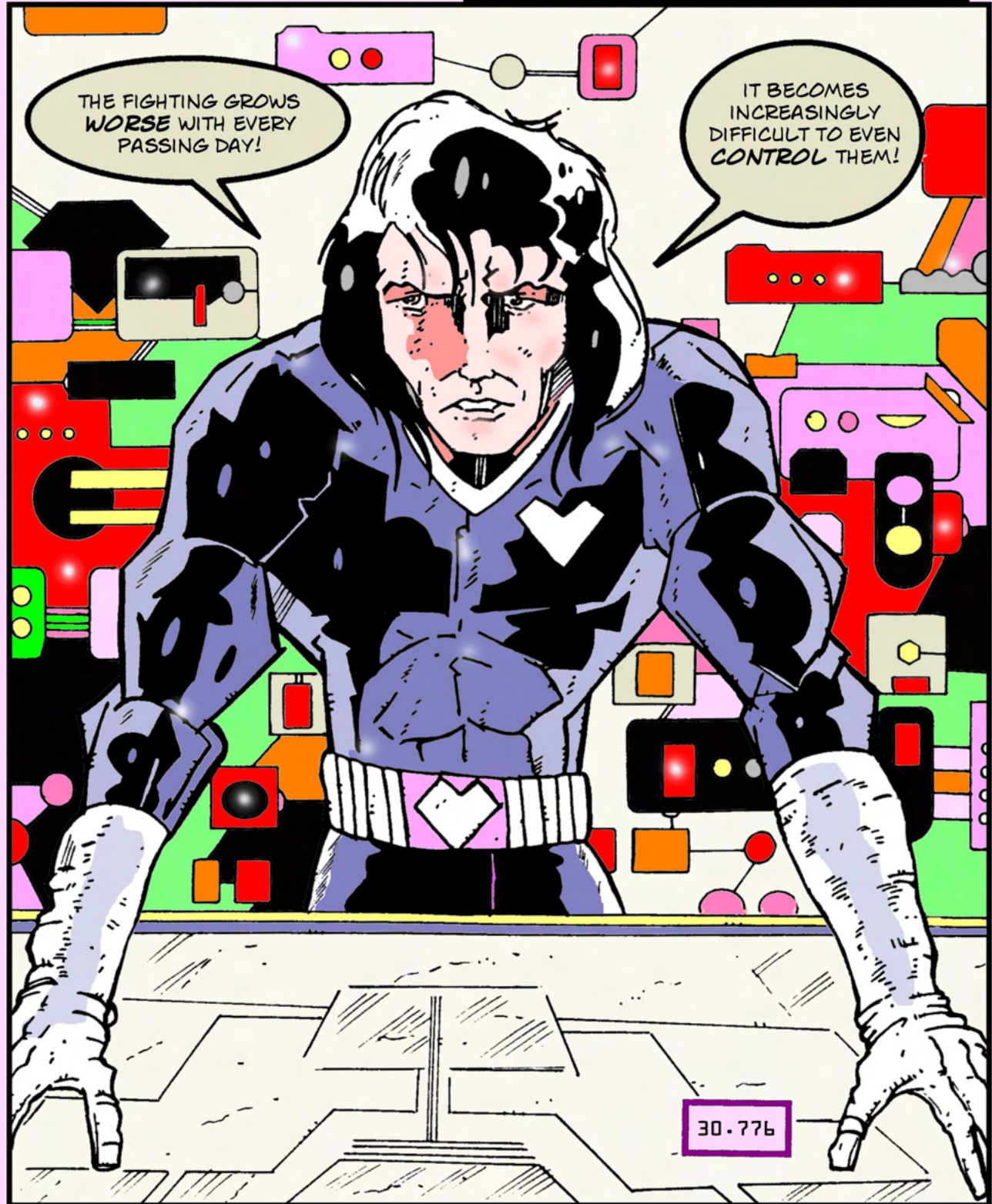
❖ END OF PROLOGUE ❖

Occasionally a fleeting dream
will bring me but a glimpse of you
for the darkness of my empty life
prevents the love I never knew
The hopes I held in childhood days
have faded far beyond recall
the doors that lead to sanity
locked line the dimly-lighted hall
The tender field where I once played
now smolders from the passing flame
and haunting ghosts who drew my gaze
enslaved me to their burning shame
Thus words do ever fail me now
expressions of the inner pain
where hearts await like feeble hay
and fire falls like summer rain
On knees beside an anguished bed
a voice within me tries to sail
beyond the heavens made of brass
to he who held a crimson nail
To understand this hurting life
the madness that entices us
and paints across each youthful face
the disillusionment of lust
And will I try to share in thoughts
the words to which no heart may heed
who follow in my ashen steps
their eyes beguiled by human greed
The crowd of voices now surround
the eye that views from clouds above
relentless war of mind and flesh
the constant cry for gentle love
The hunger that receives no hand
to feed the ever piercing need
the bandages that never heal
the wounds that never cease to bleed
Deep into that twisted maze
my life still makes but little sense
perhaps outside my wounded soul
beyond that high and darkened fence
I'll find the hope I struggle for
and faith will flow in cooling streams
and love will grasp a lonely hand
and I will find my childhood dreams.

Interlude: Childhood Dreams



THIS IS THE UNKNOWN MAN. YOU HAVE SEEN
HIS FACE A THOUSAND TIMES BUT NEVER
RECOGNIZED IT AS YOUR OWN!

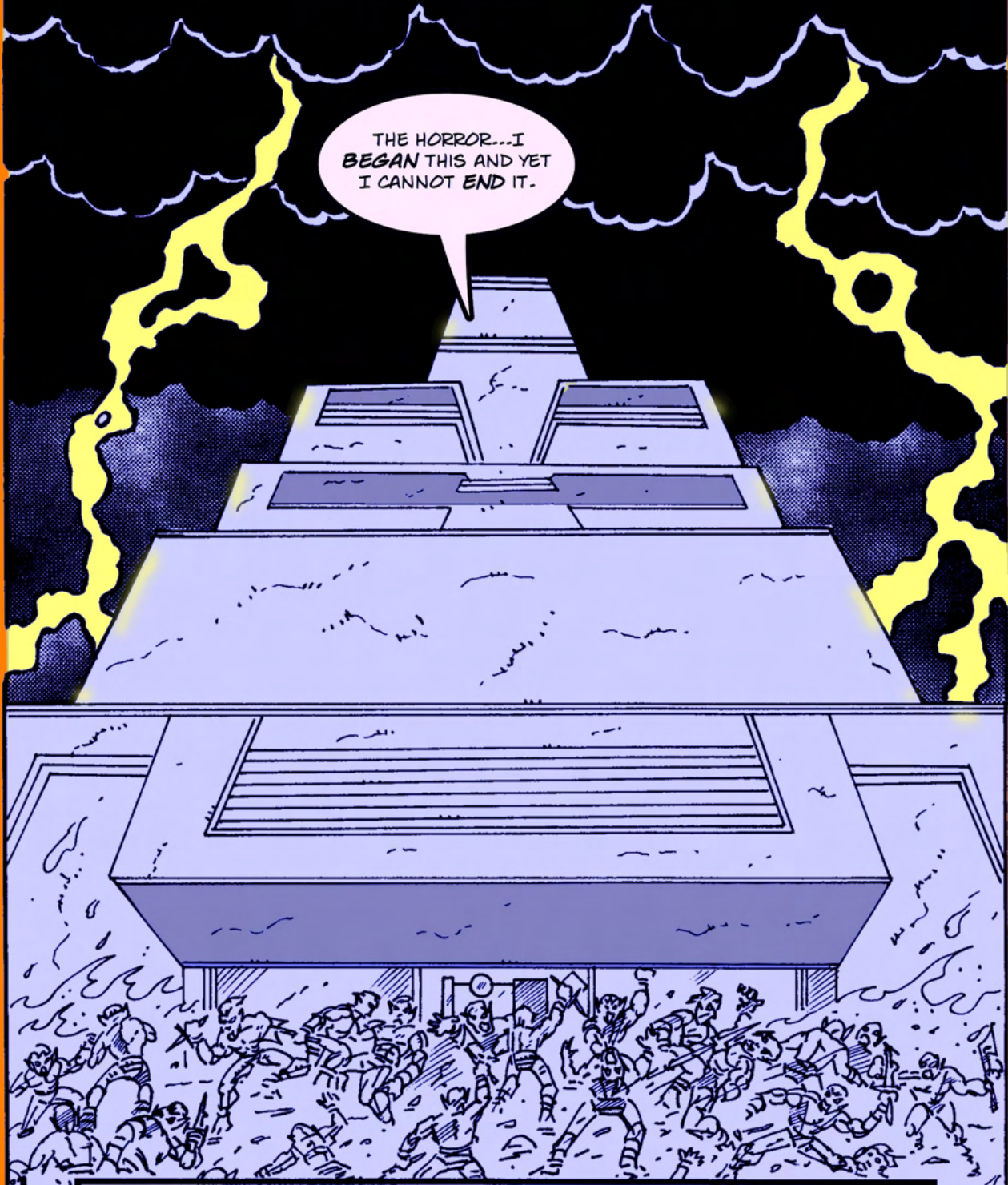


THERE ARE MANY THINGS IN LIFE WHICH IF LOST CAN
BE REPLACED...BUT WHAT ABOUT MEANING...WHAT
ABOUT PURPOSE? WHAT CAN A MAN GIVE IN
EXCHANGE FOR HIS OWN SOUL? WHAT CAN A MAN...

**SUBSTITUTE FOR
A SHADOW?**

THIS IS "HOME"

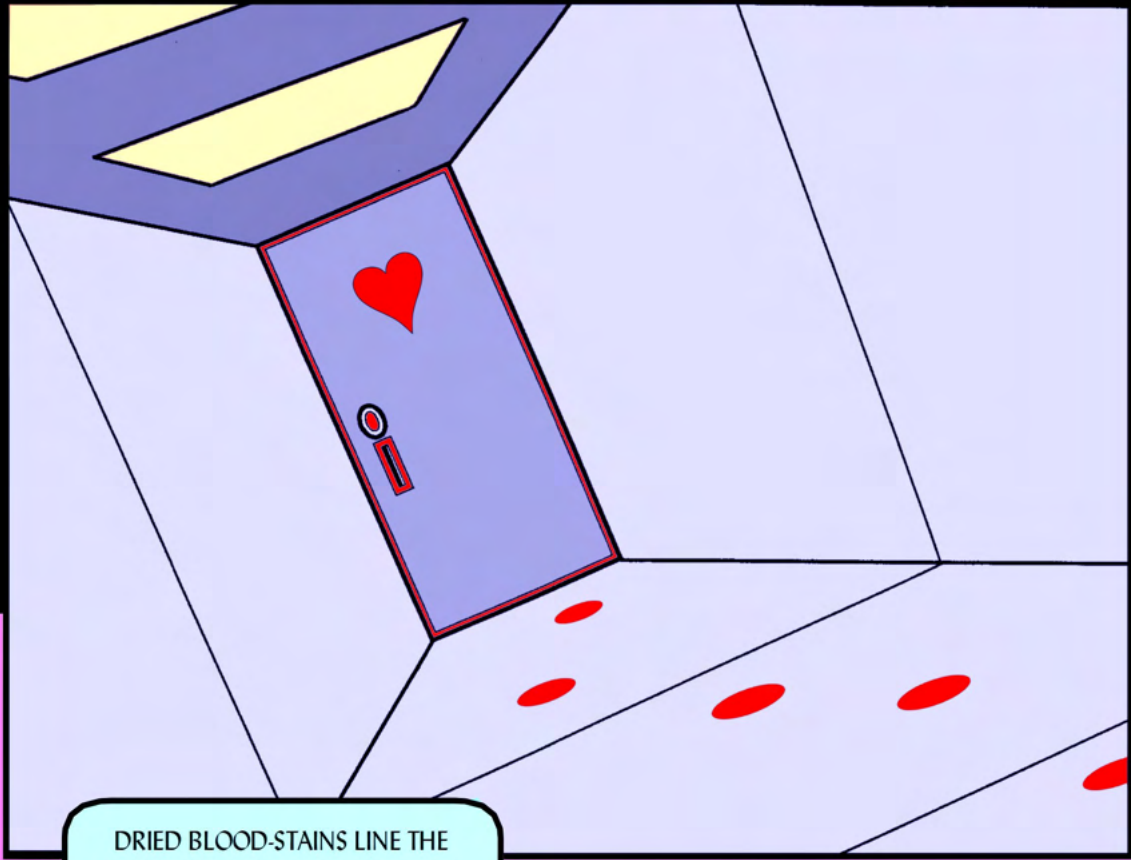
...THE IVORY-WHITE FORTRESS THAT TOWERS ABOVE THE BLOOD, FLAMES AND GORE AT THE VERY EDGE OF THE ONCE FERTILE FIELD OF "MIND" NOW SADLY RAVAGED BY THE ESCALATING WAR OF THE "GUILTS"!



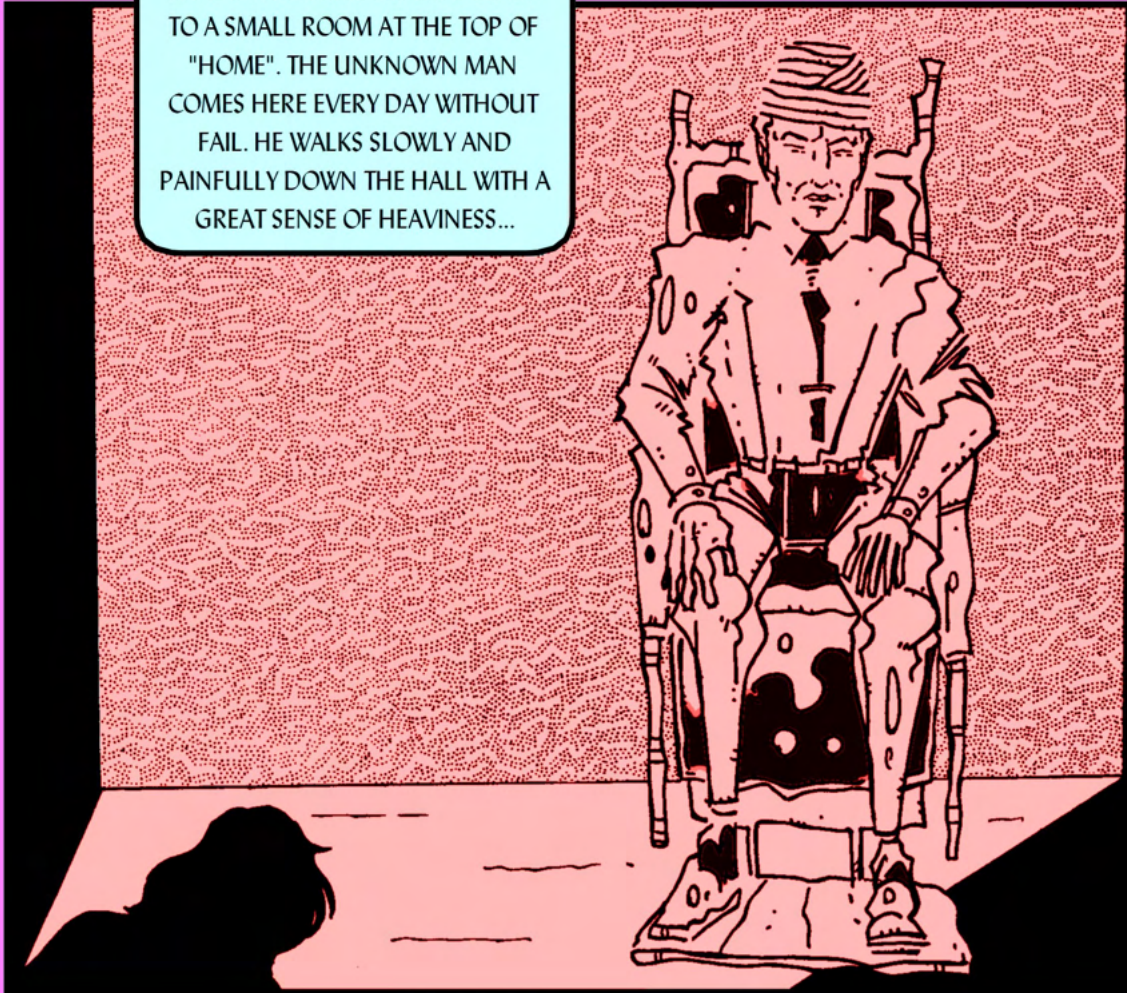
THE HORROR...I
**BEGAN THIS AND YET
I CANNOT END IT.**

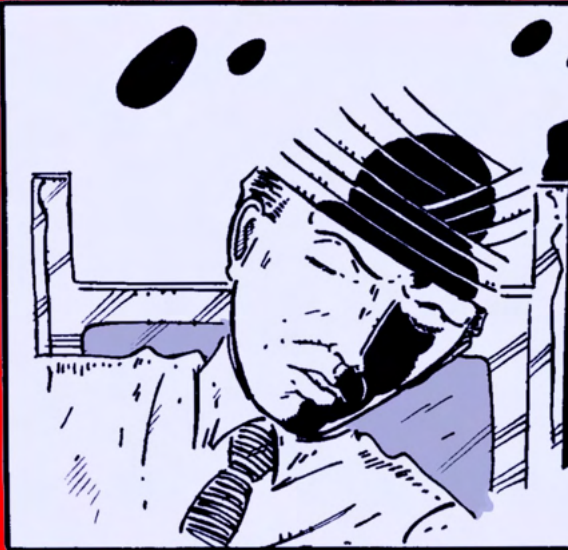
THE "GUILTS" WOULD LOVE TO INVADE THIS PLACE AND HAVE ATTEMPTED TO DO SO ON COUNTLESS OCCASIONS. THOUGH THEIR ATTACKS HAVE MARRED AND DEFACED ITS ONCE GRACEFUL SURFACE, STILL THE STRUCTURE STANDS IN STARK DEFIANCE OF THEIR WILL. THIS IS WHERE THE UNKNOWN MAN "LIVES"...YET IT IS MORE A PRISON THAN A "HOME". IT TOOK SOME TWENTY-ODD YEARS TO BUILD THESE WALLS WHICH ONLY ONE PERSON HAS EVER TRULY PENETRATED...THE HAUNTING "SHE"!

IN THE IMAGE OF A WOUNDED MAN



DRIED BLOOD-STAINS LINE THE SHADOWY CORRIDOR THAT LEADS TO A SMALL ROOM AT THE TOP OF "HOME". THE UNKNOWN MAN COMES HERE EVERY DAY WITHOUT FAIL. HE WALKS SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY DOWN THE HALL WITH A GREAT SENSE OF HEAVINESS...





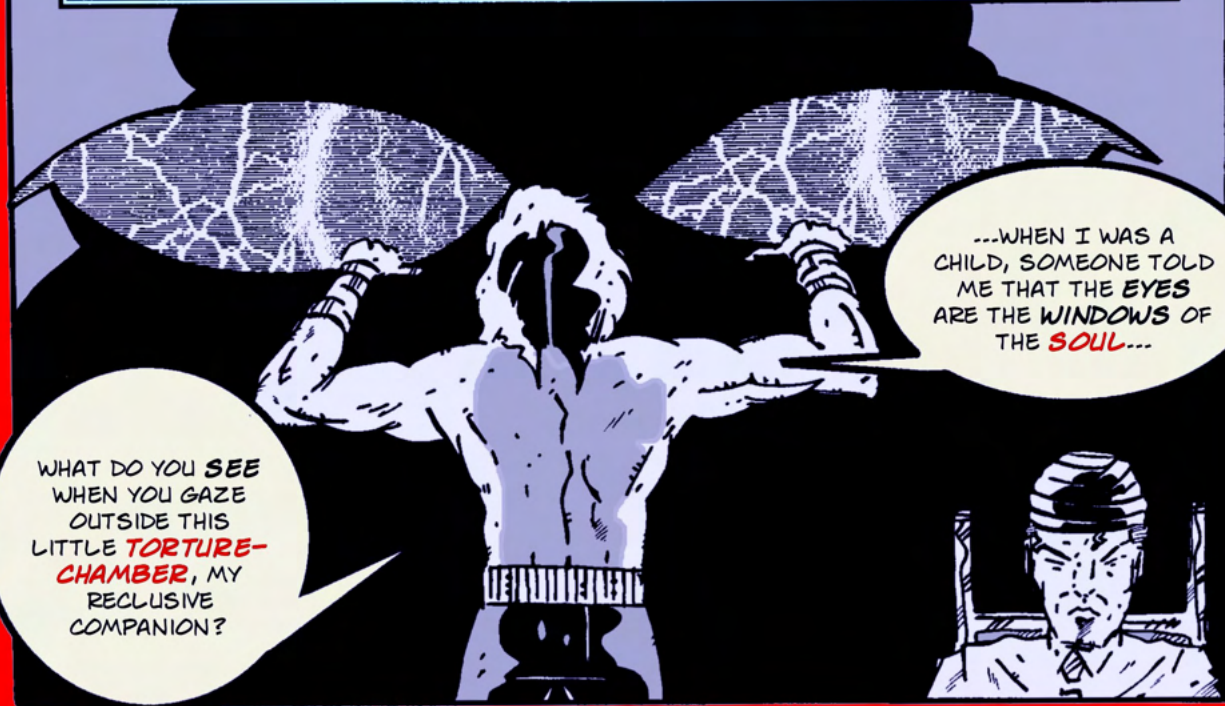
IN A WHEEL-CHAIR IN A DARKENED CORNER OF THE ROOM SITS A SILENT FIGURE. HIS HEAD HAS BEEN BANDAGED FOR MANY YEARS...AS FROM A WOUND THAT HAS NEVER HEALED...

I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE...I CAN'T BEAR IT...



THE MAN MAKES NO RESPONSE. HE SEEMS UNMOVED BY HIS VISITOR'S ANGUISHED PLEA...

THERE ARE TWO LARGE ELLIPTICAL PORTALS AT ONE END OF THE ROOM...THROUGH THEM THE UNKNOWN MAN STARES DESPONDENTLY OUT AT THE DARK TABLEAU SURROUNDING THE SOLITARY "HOME"...



WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU GAZE OUTSIDE THIS LITTLE TORTURE-CHAMBER, MY RECLUSIVE COMPANION?

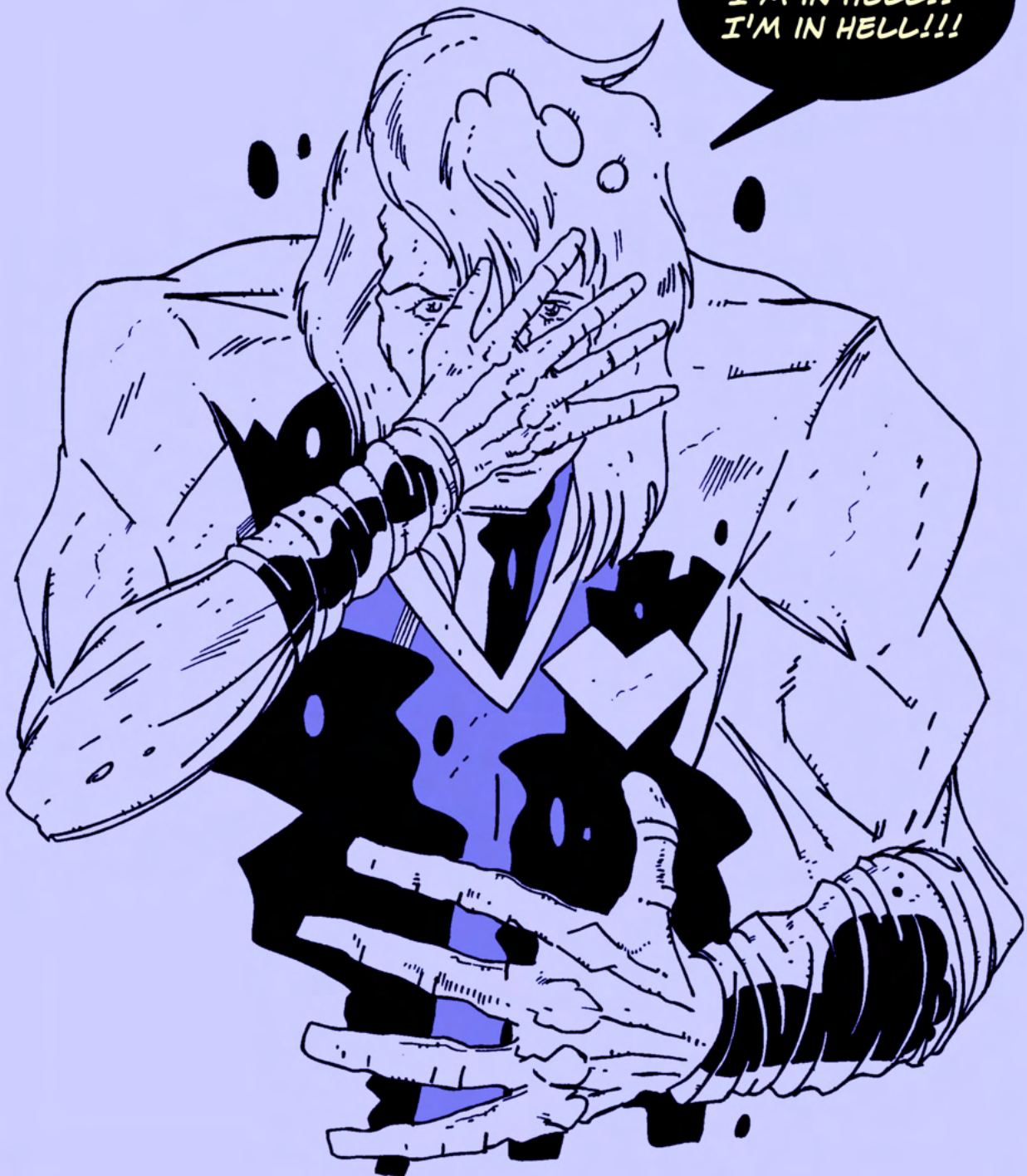
...WHEN I WAS A CHILD, SOMEONE TOLD ME THAT THE EYES ARE THE WINDOWS OF THE SOUL...





CHILDHOOD...THAT SPARKED A
MOVEMENT OF YOUR HEART, DIDN'T
IT?? YOU WANT TO GO BACK, DON'T
YOU? WELL, YOU CAN'T GO BACK!!
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT??
YOU CAN'T GO BACK!!

---OH MY GOD!!
I'M IN HELL!!
I'M IN HELL!!!



A SHARP CHILL RACES THROUGH THE UNKNOWN MAN AS HE SUDDENLY SENSES ANOTHER PRESENCE IN THE ROOM...



HER LIPS MOVE, BUT THERE IS NO SOUND...YET, HE KNOWS THAT "SHE" HAS SPOKEN HIS NAME...



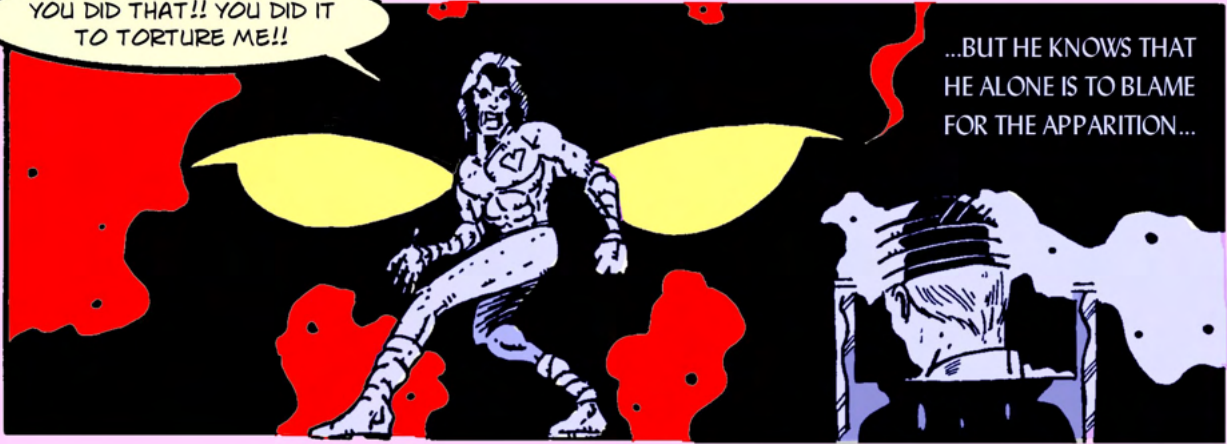
SHE'S GONE...AGAIN...



IN ANOTHER INSTANT, "SHE" VANISHES...



YOU DID THAT!! YOU DID IT TO TORTURE ME!!



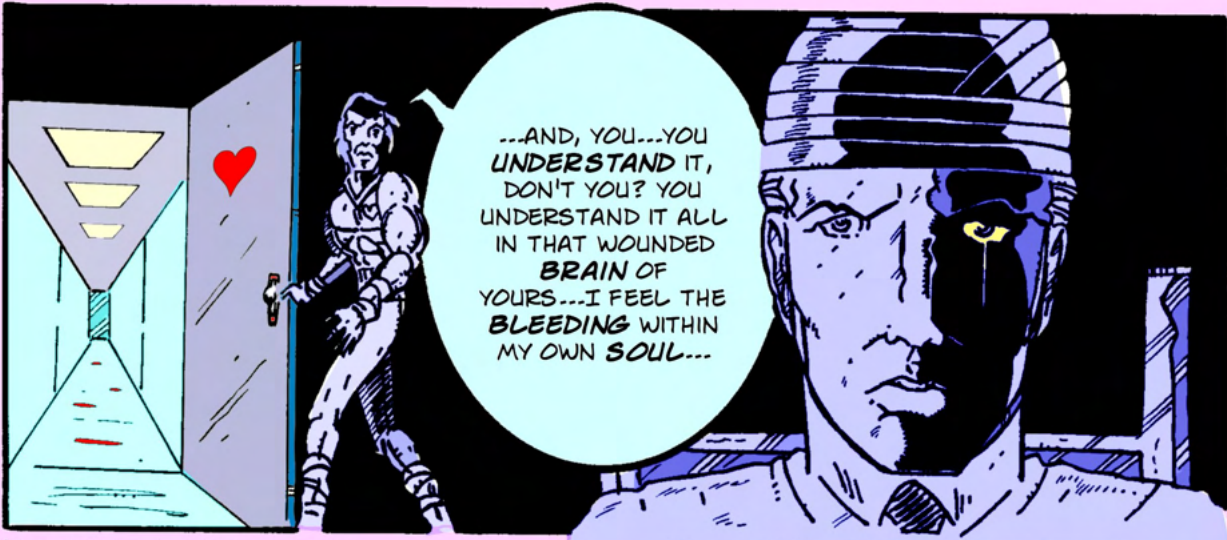
...BUT HE KNOWS THAT HE ALONE IS TO BLAME FOR THE APPARITION...

A SHADOW TAKES FORM IN FLESH AND BLOOD...AND NO MAN CASTS ONLY ONE SHADOW. THE INEXPLICABLES THAT TORTURE ME...

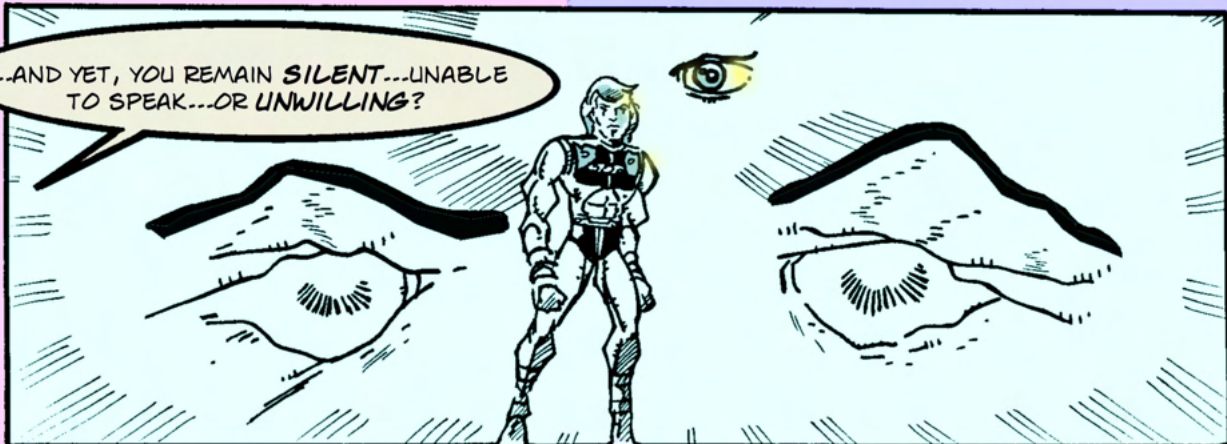


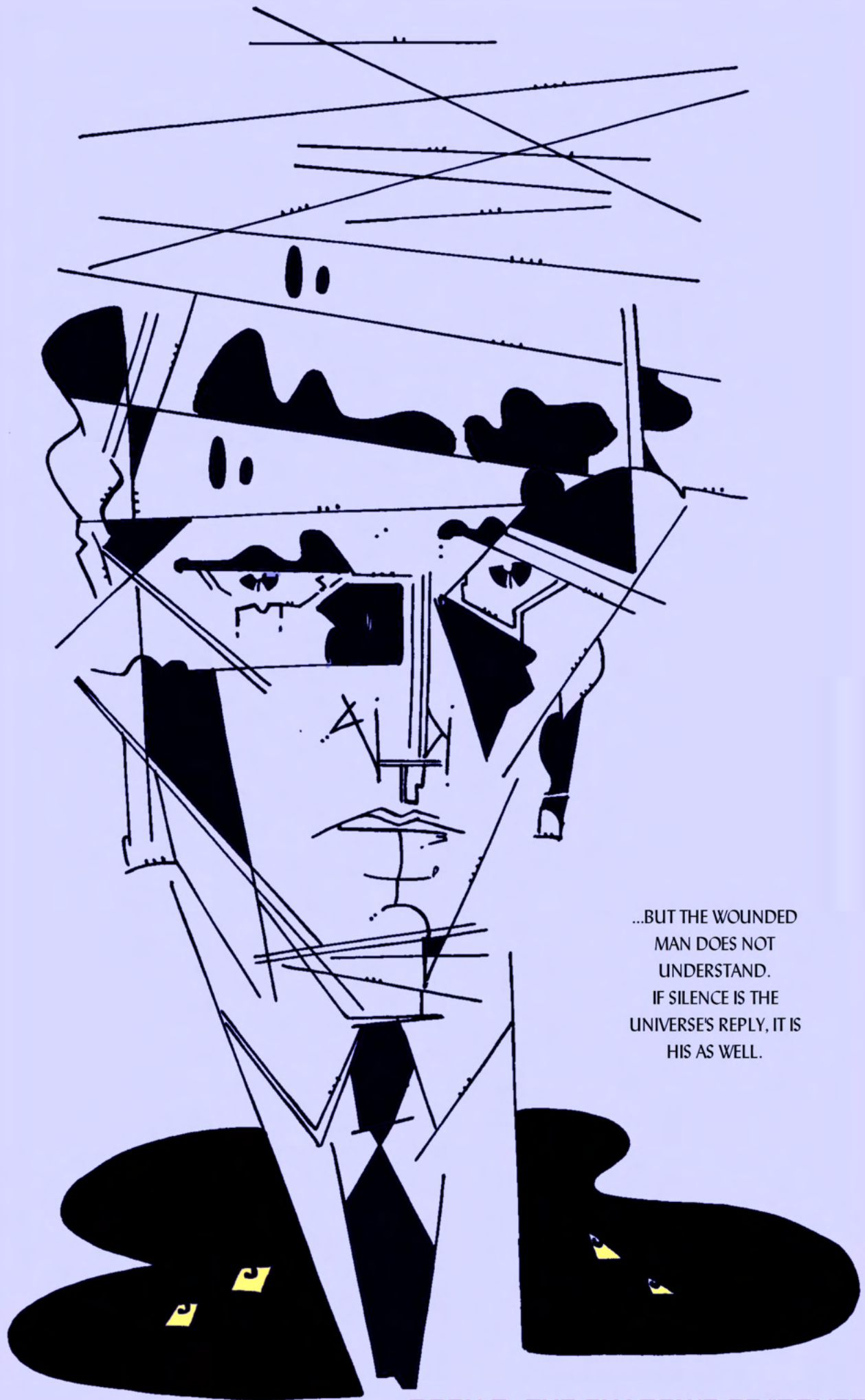
...THE GREAT SILENCE OF THE UNIVERSE IN SOMBER REPLY TO THE MEANING AND MYSTERY OF SUFFERING... FAITH...OR DESPAIR?

...AND, YOU...YOU UNDERSTAND IT, DON'T YOU? YOU UNDERSTAND IT ALL IN THAT WOUNDED BRAIN OF YOURS...I FEEL THE BLEEDING WITHIN MY OWN SOUL...



...AND YET, YOU REMAIN SILENT...UNABLE TO SPEAK...OR UNWILLING?





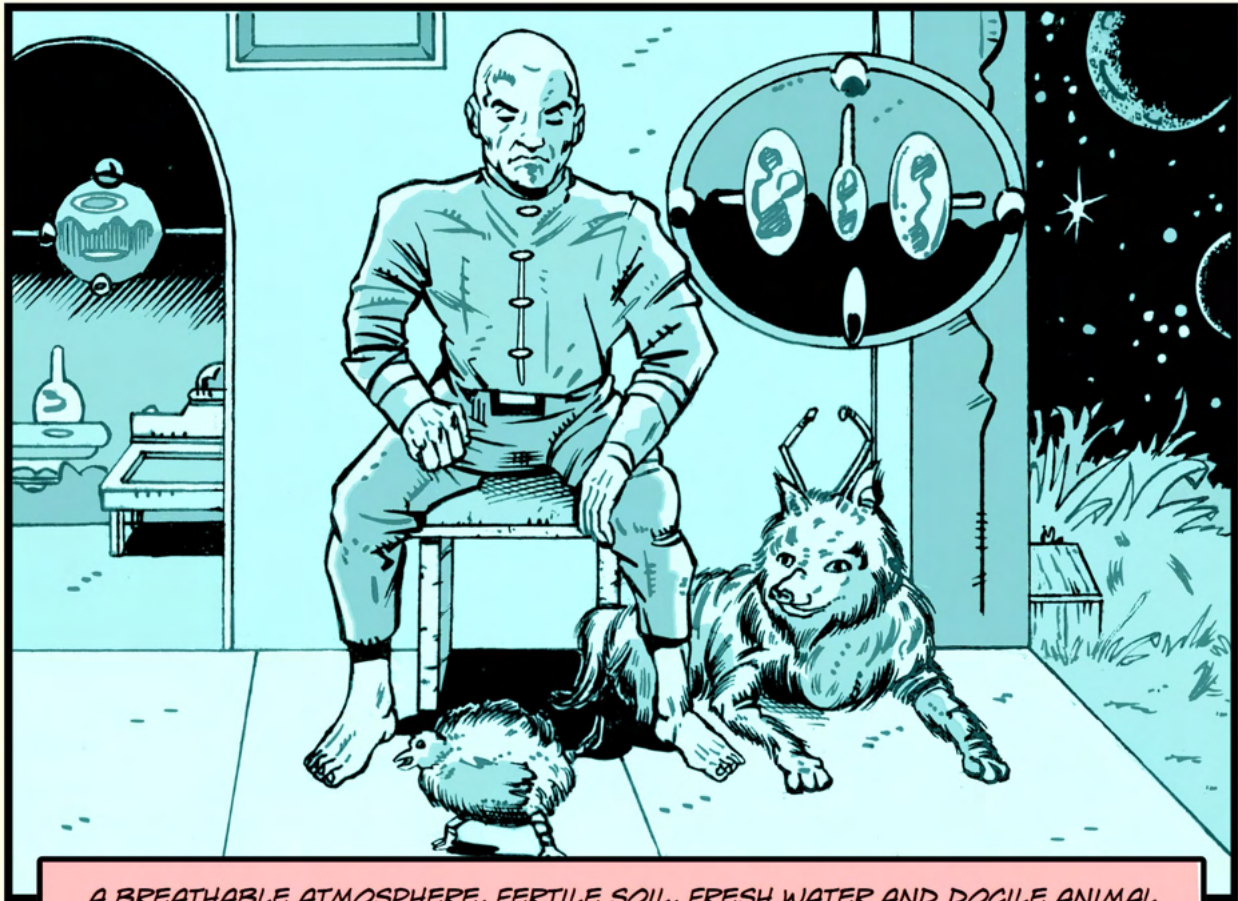
...BUT THE WOUNDED
MAN DOES NOT
UNDERSTAND.
IF SILENCE IS THE
UNIVERSE'S REPLY, IT IS
HIS AS WELL.

WHAT COMPELS A MAN TO TURN HIS BACK ON ALL HE HAS EVER KNOWN AND TO MAKE HIS HOME OUT HERE ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS OF SPACE?
WHAT CRUELITIES, WHAT MISUNDERSTANDINGS, WHAT DISILLUSIONMENTS MUST HE HAVE SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF HIS OWN KIND TO FORCE HIM DOWN THIS DARK HALLWAY OF SEPARATION AND LONELINESS?
SOMEONE ONCE SAID, "LIFE IS A COMEDY FOR THOSE WHO THINK...AND A TRAGEDY FOR THOSE WHO FEEL". HOW COULD A BRUSQUE AND THOUGHTLESS WORLD EVER COMPREHEND THE KIND AND GENTLE SOUL OF A DECENT MAN DRIVEN TO BECOME...

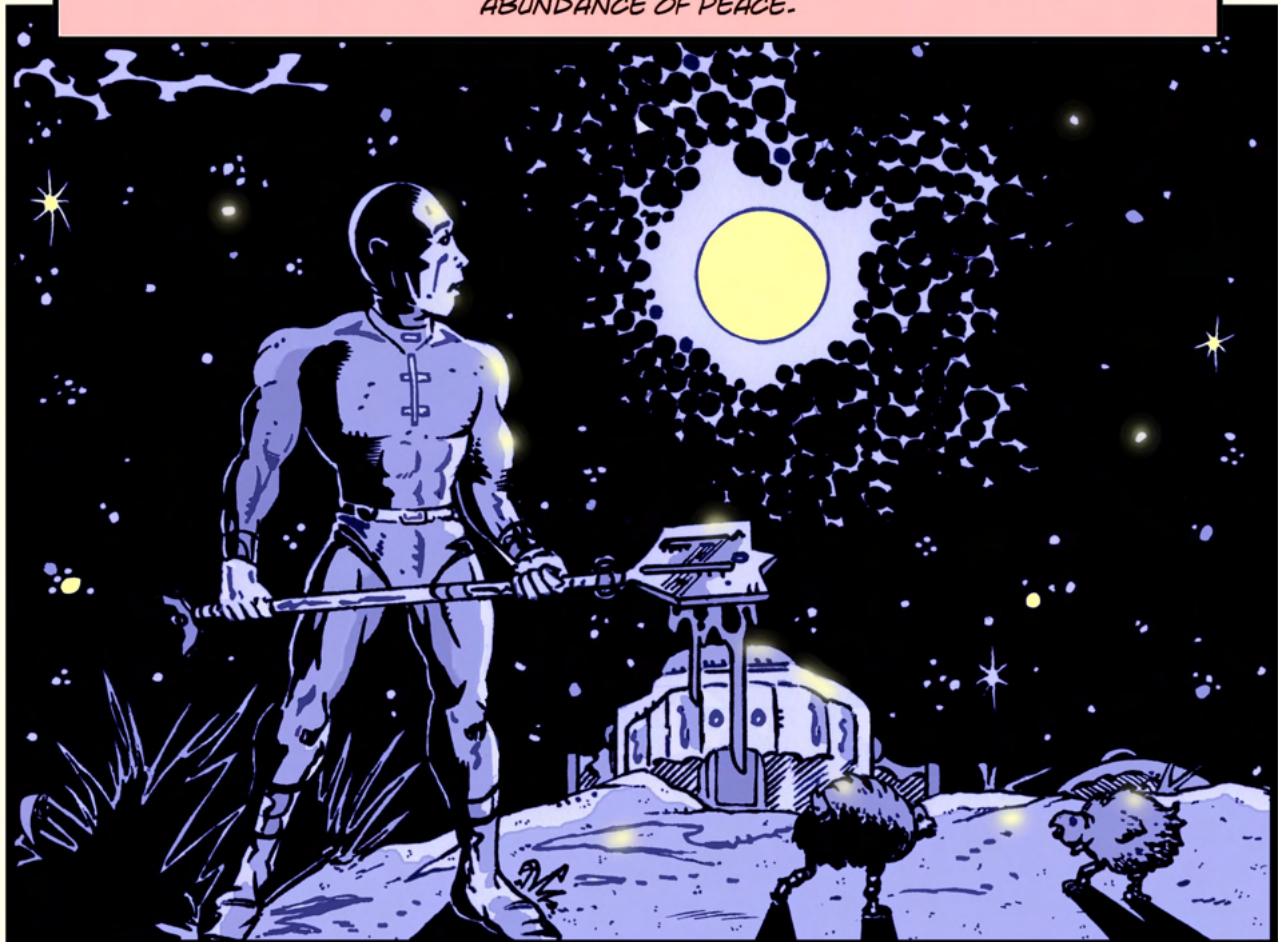


THE RECLUSE

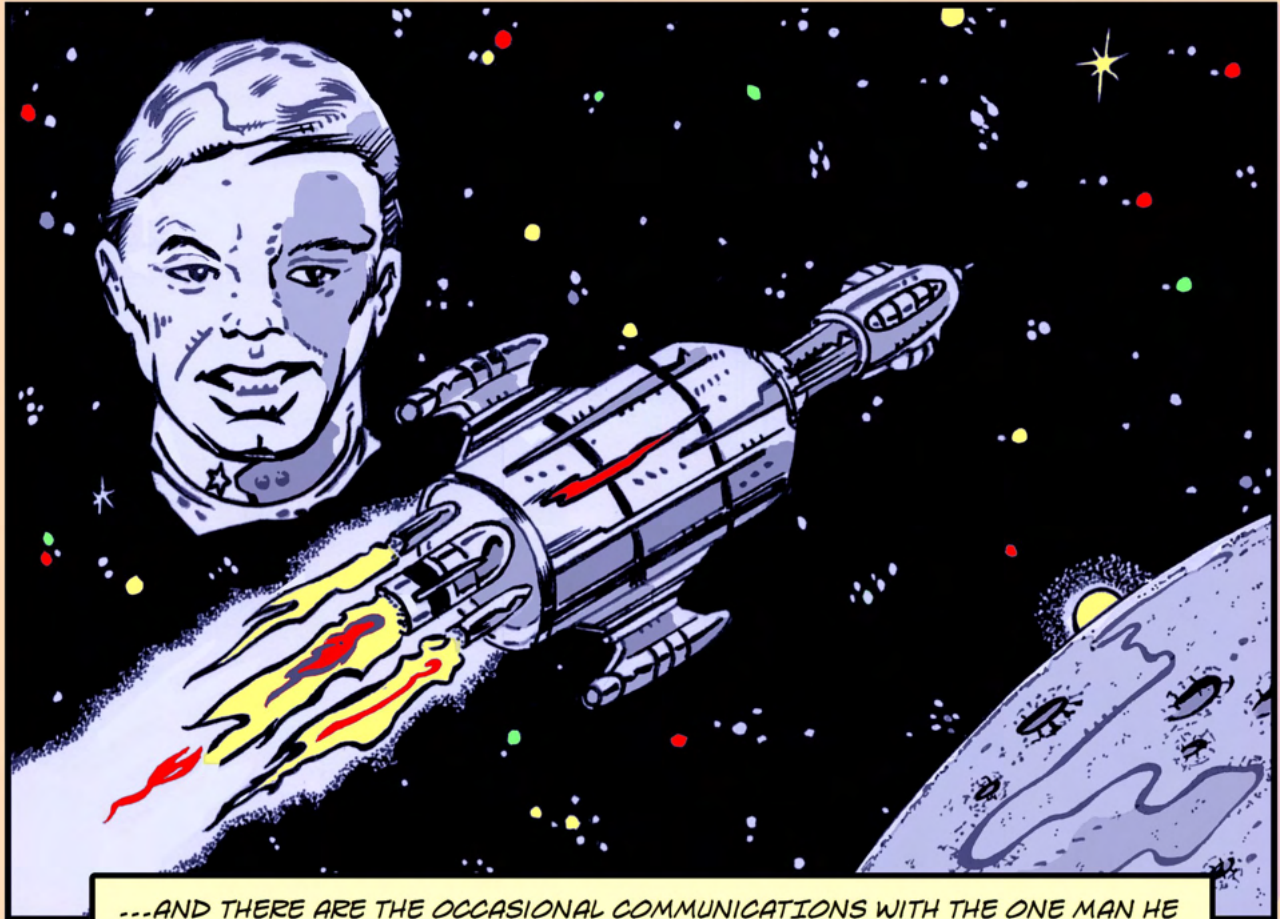
WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES RUBINO INKED BY THOMAS AHEARN



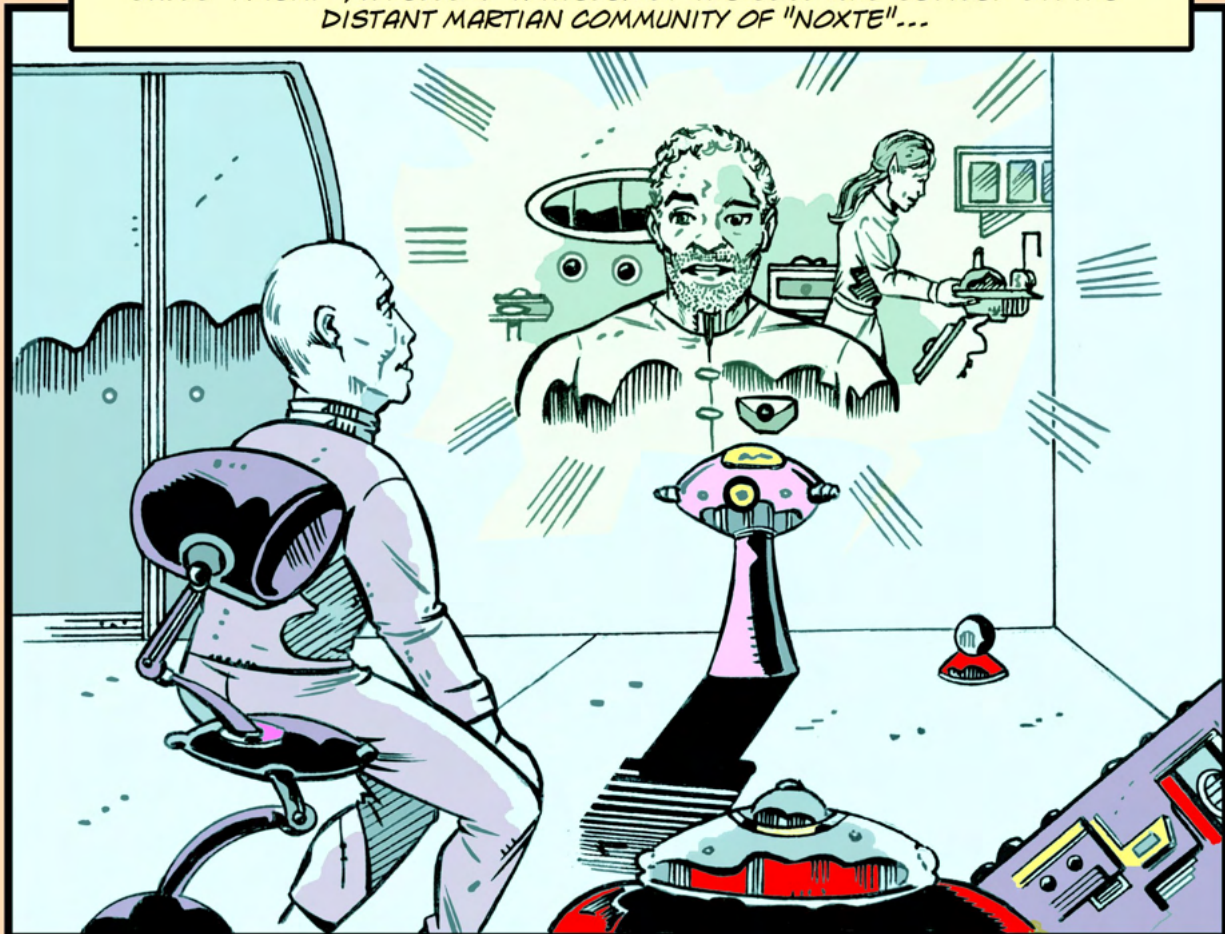
A BREATHABLE ATMOSPHERE, FERTILE SOIL, FRESH WATER AND DOCILE ANIMAL COMPANIONS...GIVEN WARMTH AND LIGHT BY A PERPETUALLY-FISSIONABLE ARTIFICIAL NUCLEAR "SUN"- AND GOOD, CLEAN HARD WORK TO OCCUPY THE MIND AND STRENGTHEN THE BODY...WHAT MORE COULD A FUGITIVE FROM "HUMANITY" ASK FOR? ...AND, OH YES- PEACE OF MIND. FOR ITS SOLE HUMAN INHABITANT-LIFE ON ONE OF THESE COMMERCIALY-CULTIVATED ASTEROIDS OFFERED A RICH ABUNDANCE OF PEACE.



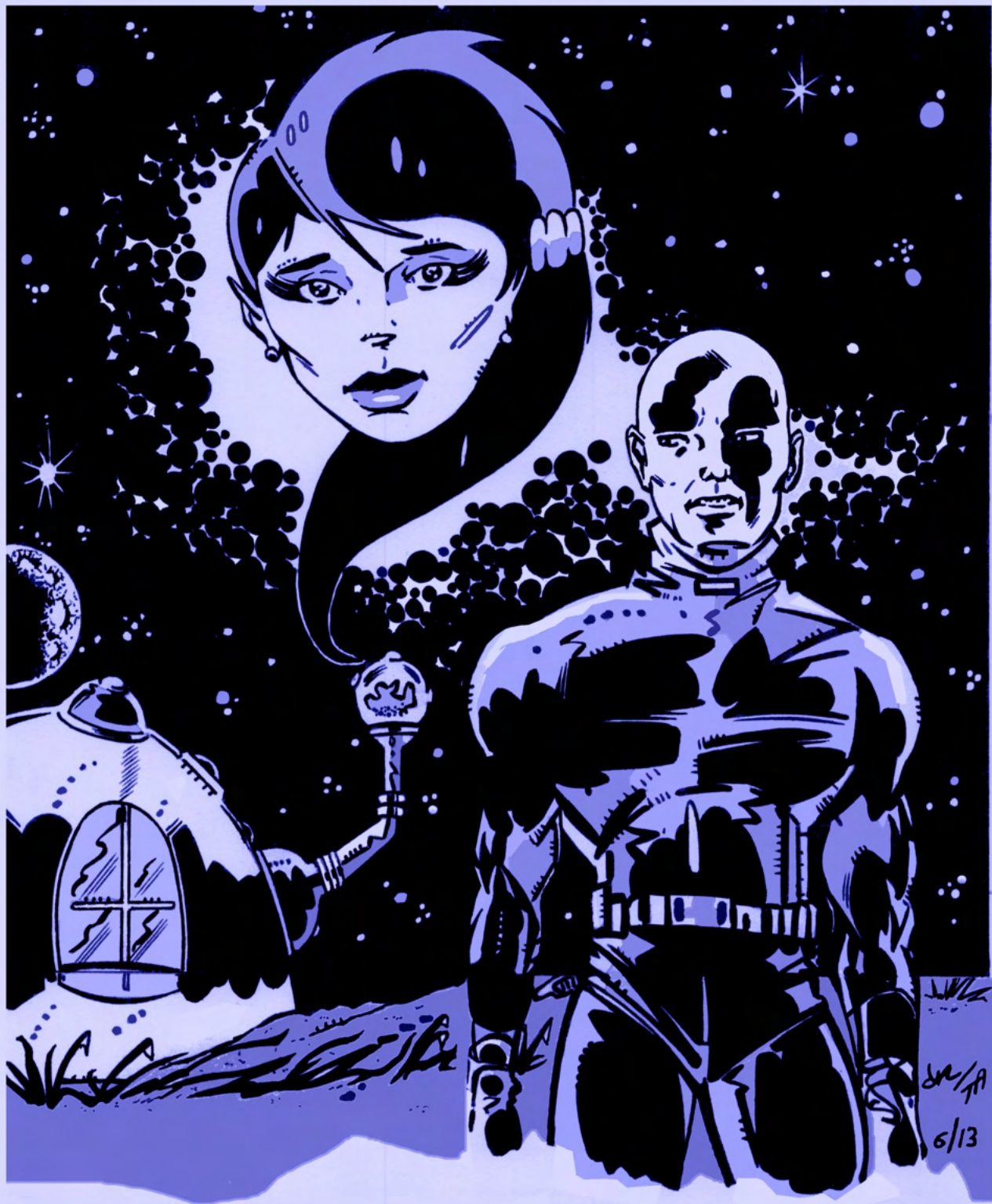
...YET NO MAN IS EVER TRULY AN ISLAND. EVEN A MAN SUCH AS THIS- IN SELF-IMPOSED EXILE- STILL FINDS HIMSELF LOOKING FORWARD TO THE ANNUAL VISITS FROM THE INTERSTELLAR SUPPLY SHIP AND ITS AFFABLE CAPTAIN REYES...A FEW MOMENTS OF HUMAN CONVERSATION ONCE AGAIN...LIKE WELCOME DEW ON A WEARY, PARCHED SOIL...



...AND THERE ARE THE OCCASIONAL COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE ONE MAN HE CALLS "FRIEND", A FELLOW-TRAVELER OF THE SOUL WHO SETTLED ON THE DISTANT MARTIAN COMMUNITY OF "NOXTE"...

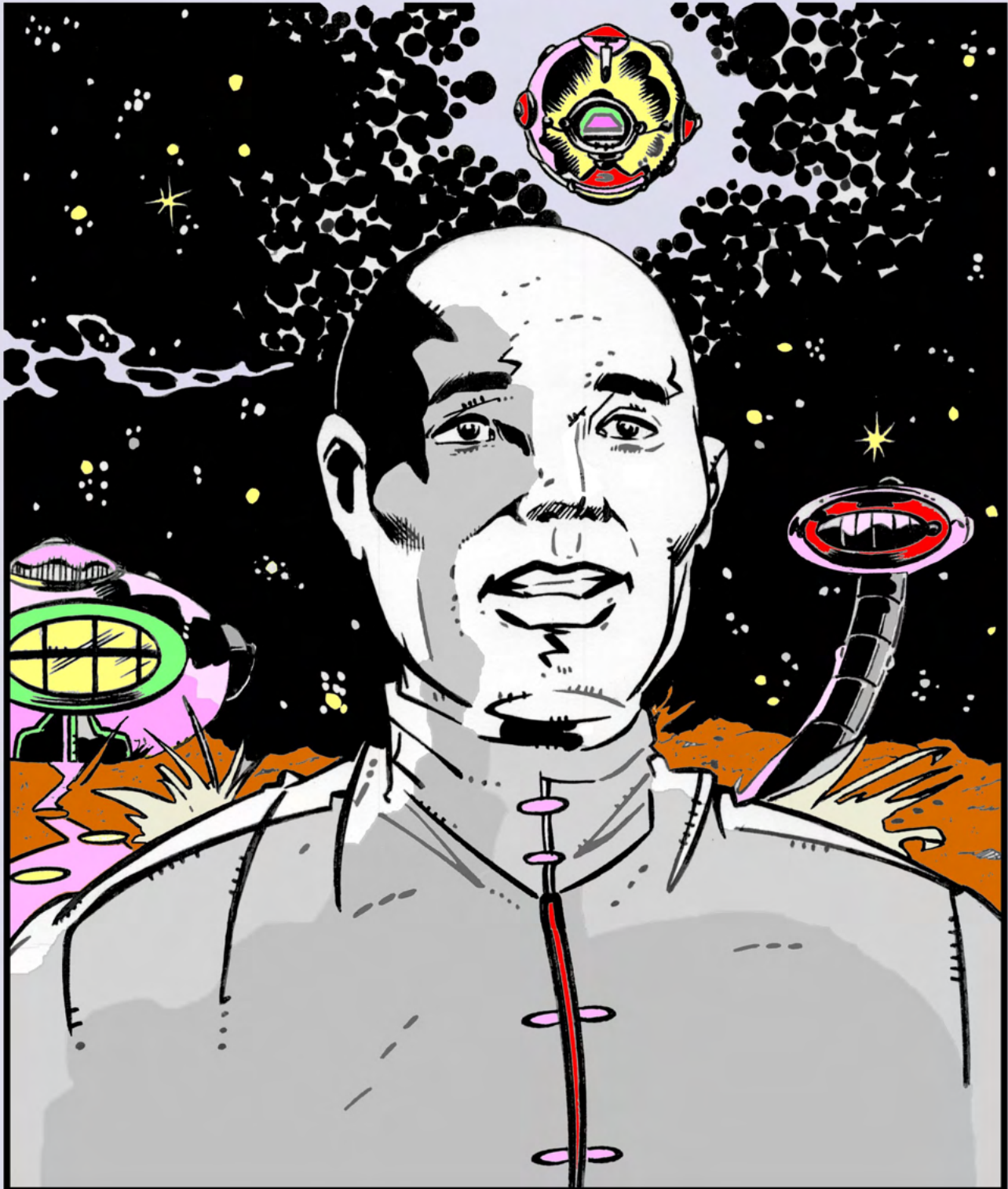


...BUT FOR EVERY MAN THERE IS A GHOSTLY CORRIDOR OF MEMORIES...
BEHIND EVERY SOMBER CURTAIN ANOTHER FACE, ANOTHER VOICE...
OFTEN SUPPRESSED BUT ULTIMATELY...INESCAPABLE.
THERE ARE TIMES (MANY TIMES) WHEN HE PAUSES AND REMEMBERS...
LIKE A FLOOD THE EMOTIONS DELUGE HIS SOUL...ALMOST DROWNING IT WITH SORROW.



...AND HE RECALLS THAT SPECIAL ONE...NO, NOT AS SHE REALLY WAS-
BUT AS HE HAD ALWAYS SEEN HER IN HIS PURE AND NOBLE HEART...
AN IMAGE HE FINALLY WAS COMPELLED TO ACKNOWLEDGE AS SIMPLY AN ILLUSION...
A SAD, HEART-BREAKING ILLUSION...

WHAT MAN DOES NOT LONG FOR A BETTER PLACE BEYOND THIS LIFE?
A WORLD WHERE LIFE IS WHAT IT SHOULD'VE BEEN...
...WHERE SOULS ARE NOT HIDDEN, DISFIGURED OR DISGUISED...
WHERE THE GOOD ARE NOT TORMENTED NOR THE WICKED EXALTED...
WHERE LOVE IS INNOCENT, CHILDLIKE AND SINCERE...



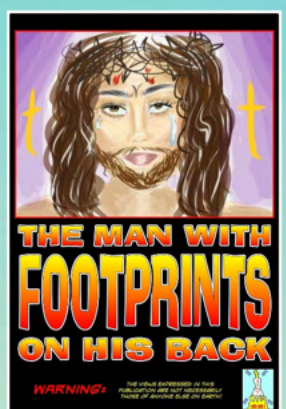
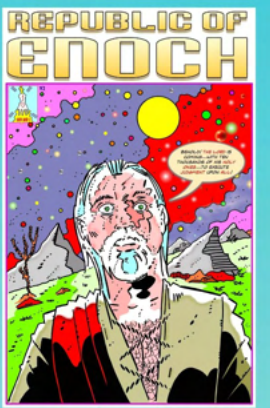
...YES- BEATEN, CRUSHED, DESPAIRING-
YET HIS HEART STILL RETAINS THAT FINAL SPARK OF ASPIRATION-
THAT THERE REALLY IS GOODNESS AT THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSE
AND THAT IN THE END IT WILL TRIUMPH...
AND HIS SOUL TOO WILL TRIUMPH WITH IT.

I DREW A "BLANK!"



EPILOGUE: I ORIGINALLY CREATED THE MR. FAITH/ FOLLOWERS OF THE ALL AND LIFE ON PLANET "BLANK" SERIES AT THE SAME TIME IN 1984, INTENDING THEM TO BE COMPLIMENTARY CONCEPTS- TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN, TWO FACES OF THE SAME SOUL. THE ONE A DEEPLY SPIRITUAL MAN OF POWERFUL, SINCERE FAITH; THE OTHER A HIGHLY FLAWED, AFFLICTED AND PERPETUALLY-TORMENTED SOUL. THIS ISSUE CONTAINS THE FIRST SEGMENT OF THE FOUR-PART LOPB SERIES. THOUGH "THE RECLUSE" IS NOT A PART OF THE STORYLINE NEVERTHELESS I FELT IT WOULD BE A FITTING ADDITION TO THE BOOK. MAY BOTH WORKS LEAD YOU INTO SOMETHING SO LACKING IN TODAY'S SOULLESS "ARTS": SPIRITUAL REFLECTION.

GOD AND I PROJECTS



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"GUE!"
"GUE!"



the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;
but a wounded spirit who can bear?